

EU Fire Safety Network

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John Dalli
European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy
European Commission
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PREVENTION OF COOKING RELATED FIRES

I am writing to seek a view from the Commission on developing an EU Safety Standard for new cookers (electric and gas appliances) to make these products fire safer.

As a first step, I should perhaps explain that I am the Chair of the EU Fire Safety Network. The membership of the Network comprises one representative per Member State, the objective being to exchange knowledge and foster cooperation between nations to help improve fire safety, particularly in domestic dwellings.

The Network has previously made representations to the Commission about the number of deaths and casualties caused by carelessly discarded cigarettes, asking that consideration be given to developing an EU Safety Standard and test method for Fire Safer Cigarettes. To that end, we have been very pleased with progress on this matter, and look forward to the Reference Standard for Fire Safer Cigarettes being published in the Official Journal on 17 November 2011.

We now see cooking related fire deaths and injuries as the next major fire safety challenge. The majority of cooking fires are preventable, and tend to be as a result of cooking appliances being left unattended by the householder.

Fire statistics from Network Members States show that cooking related fires in the EU cause the greatest number of injuries, and the second highest amount of fire deaths. In my own country of Finland, in 2010 cooking fires accounted for 22% of all dwelling fires, resulting in 7% of all fire deaths, and 20% of all fire related injuries. In England in 2009/10, cooking appliance fires (fat pan and grill fires) were responsible for 28 accidental dwelling fire deaths (13% of all deaths), and 2373 injuries (41% of all injuries) – the second biggest cause of fire deaths (after smoking products), and the most significant cause of fire injuries. Analysis of available EU fire statistics shows that cooking related fire deaths is also an EU-wide issue. Annex A provides the UK 10-year trend analysis for cooking fire deaths and injuries for England, and a snapshot of the problem in other EU countries.

We are aware of emerging market technology – in particular, stove heat alarms, connected to a power shut-off switch – designed to reduce the incidence of fires, deaths and injuries caused by cooking. The technology can be both retrospectively fitted to existing electric and gas cookers, and built in to new cookers at the time of manufacture. It has the potential to help reduce fire injuries in some of the most vulnerable and high risk groups in society – the elderly (including Alzheimer/dementia patients), disabled and impaired people, and people addicted to alcohol and other substances etc.

There are already a variety of products in the European market and especially in the Nordic countries. However, as a recent Norwegian study noted, different operating principles and lack of reliable data on how successful the devices are makes it difficult for consumers to choose between products and in some cases may result in false sense of safety.

At present there is no European or international standard for these fire safety devices. Nor are we aware of any national legislation requiring their use with the exception of Norway where from 1 July 2011 shut-off devices are required in new electric stove installations (Norwegian standard NEK 400:2010 Electrical low voltage installations, Part 400-8-823 residential buildings).

I hope this letter provides you with useful background to this important issue. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further information. I am copying this letter to Stephano Soro, Head of Product and Service Safety Unit, at the European Commission.

Yours faithfully,



Kirsi Rajaniemi
Chair – EU Fire Safety Network

Annex A: Statistics on cooking related fires

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Cooking Related Fires in England

Statistics

Cooking accidents are the biggest cause of accidental dwelling fires in England.

Year	Fires	Fatal casualties	Non-fatal casualties
1998	25,614 (56%)	47 (13%)	5,624 (55%)
1999	26,282 (56%)	44 (13%)	5,424 (55%)
2000	26,643 (59%)	48 (17%)	5,073 (54%)
2001	24,010 (55%)	47 (15%)	4,841 (52%)
2002	21,950 (56%)	39 (15%)	4,517 (53%)
2003	22,195 (56%)	44 (15%)	4,317 (53%)
2004	21,707 (56%)	31 (14%)	4,088 (52%)
2005	21,591 (56%)	34 (15%)	4,132 (54%)
2006	20,559 (55%)	32 (14%)	3,780 (50%)
2007	18,991 (54%)	24 (12%)	3,646 (51%)

Cooking Fires Statistics within the EU

Country	Cooking Fires	Cooking Fire Deaths	Cooking Fire Injuries
Czech Republic	0.7%	1.5%	1.7%
Denmark	20%	7.5%	N/A
Finland	21.8%	7%	20%
Hungary	1.1%	N/A	N/A
Lithuania	1.1%	0.4%	4.3%
Netherlands	32%	8.1%	N/A
Norway	7.6%	10.5%	11.2%
Sweden	15.7%	6.7%	21.2%
UK	56.7%	15.6%	54.0%
ANNUAL TOTAL ACROSS COUNTRIES	33.6%	8%	45.5%
AVERAGE PERCENTAGE	17.4%	7.2%	18.7%